

THE GLORY YEARS OF FOOTBALL
Centenary College of Louisiana 1922–1942



By Bentley Sloane

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*The author was a student at Centenary College during 1923-1927
when the McMillin teams were opening a new era.*

The story of football at Centenary College of Louisiana in the 1920s is so dramatic and unique that it deserves special treatment all of its own. A small, obscure liberal arts college with a student body of less than 300 suddenly fields a powerful football team in 1922, and for the next 20 years plays and defeats teams in the Southwest Conference (Texas) and some of the nation's best in other athletic conferences, including Boston College, the University of Iowa, the University of Mississippi, Oklahoma A & M, and Louisiana State University. How was this accomplished, what did it mean, and what was its contribution to the history of Centenary College of Louisiana? This special brochure will attempt to answer these questions.

Intercollegiate athletics was not a tradition that Centenary College brought to its Shreveport campus in September 1908, when the school opened for its first semester of academic work. College authorities had frowned upon any organized teams of baseball or football as reflected in the following resolution adopted by the Board of Trustees in 1898:

“Resolved, that we will not countenance or permit students of the college or any professor to engage in any intercollegiate contests of baseball or football, or in any physical games outside the college campus, and we forbid all ball play within a hundred yards of any building.”

Prior to this resolution, and no doubt the reason for it, a makeshift Centenary football team had played Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and was not only beaten by a large score, but two of Centenary's players had to be hospitalized in Baton Rouge for several days.

In 1901 these restrictions were eased somewhat for the baseball teams as recorded in the Trustee minutes:

“Games with other schools are allowed provided our boys do not travel on Sunday going to or returning from games.”

The first official records of athletic teams at Centenary College in Shreveport are to be found in the 1908–1909 college catalog and the November 1909 issue of the *Maroon and White*, a monthly publication edited by the students. The 1908 catalog states that the Centenary Athletic Association was organized and included all students interested in baseball, football, tennis, and track teams. Professor James Hinton who taught Latin and Greek, was president of the Association. One year later, the college catalog announced that a spacious and attractive athletic park was ready for use. This park was no doubt on the northwest section of the campus, which had been cleared “out of the woods” and would be the site of the first athletic grandstand erected a few years later. The *Maroon and White* gave the schedule and scores of the football games played in 1909. The team was called the “Maroons,” and Professor James Hinton was listed as the coach. Players were listed as follows: Clint Willis, Archie Johnson, William C. Honeycutt, Earl Whittington, K. Hundley, and D.B. Boddie. No games were won that year. Scores were as follows: Louisiana Industrial Institute in Ruston 60, Centenary 0; Henderson College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas 83, Centenary 0; Louisiana State Normal, Natchitoches, Louisiana 17, Centenary 0. This same year a girls' basketball team was announced with Professor H.C. Henderson as coach.

In November 1910, another student publication called *The Lookout* representing the Union Literary Society listed members of the football team with D.B. Boddie, one of the players, as manager and coach. Boddie later became a Methodist preacher in the Louisiana Conference.

The college catalog for 1912-1913 noted that an “outdoor gymnasium” had been erected and included rings, parallel bars, vaulting horses, ladders, etc. No doubt it included basketball goals since the College was fielding basketball teams at that time. This was the year when military drill was introduced and the War Department furnished rifles and other equipment. Candidates for all the teams mentioned were in short supply since there were only 70 students enrolled in 1913, and 36 of these were in the Academy (prep school attached to the College).

In 1912, Paul M. Brown, Jr., was a student in the College and participated in the athletic program. In 1981, as an honored alumnus and trustee, he was interviewed by Dr. Walter Lowrey of the History Department, who gave his account of the program:

“I was involved in athletics and hungry all the time. We had a whole lot of light bread and syrup in the dining hall;

and when we came in, they would fill us up with this. I don't know how good it was for our health, but we endured it. I ran with the baseball team most of the time. We played baseball in the spring and football in the winter. Two of my friends, Clint Willis and A.W. Baird, went on to LSU and Tulane University, where they starred in football and baseball. The sports we had at Centenary were "pick up," and there was no such thing as pure amateurism. It was an accepted practice to pick up a good athlete, pay his way, and give him some spending money."

In 1916, President Wynn, in his annual report to the Board of Trustees, stated that Centenary's venture into intercollegiate athletics was too costly since the total school enrollment was 77 and only 25 of these were college students.

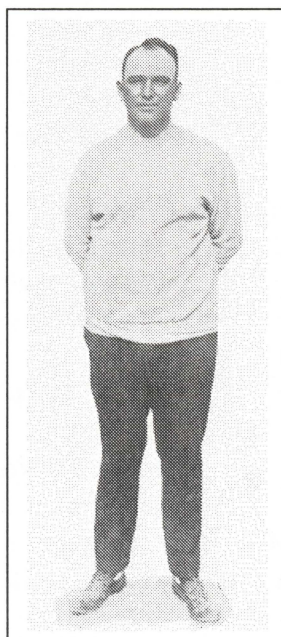
Post-War Athletics in the 1920s

After World War I, the men and women of the United States armed forces returned to civilian life and began to channel their competitive energies into the arena of sports, creating a new generation of heroes unrelated to war. In baseball Babe Ruth was the famous name. His team, the New York Yankees, had a spring training camp in Shreveport in 1921, and the natives began to dream of a team of national prominence to make Shreveport its home. Other sports heroes of that day were Jack Dempsey in boxing, Bobby Jones in golf, Bill Tilden in tennis, and Jim Thorpe in football.

In American colleges and universities, football was becoming king, and the famous coaches and players, trainers, cheerleaders, academic tutors (seldom mentioned), and camp followers were the subjects of a growing army of sports writers who kept the public informed as to school ratings, won-and-lost records, and statistics of individual players. The big-name schools were building huge stadiums to accommodate the growing crowds. Winning teams brought publicity and fame to their schools, and recruiters were hired to lure the best high school players. Ivy League schools such as Yale, Harvard, and Princeton were producing great teams. The University of Notre Dame was widely known through its great coach Knute Rockne and his famous football backfield called the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." (The public knew this much about the Book of Revelation.) Some thought the Roman Catholic Church in some way brought divine wisdom and power to this winning team and its great coach!

Move to Upgrade Athletics in 1919 – 1920 Homer Norton Arrives

During the presidency of W.H. Bourne, beginning May 27, 1919, Centenary College made a definite move toward an academic renaissance with the ultimate goal of qualifying for an “A” grade status and being accepted into the highest accrediting associations of the nation. As one of the steps toward this goal, a full-time coach and athletic director, Homer Norton, was brought in during the 1919 – 1920 school year. Norton had excelled as an athlete at Birmingham-Southern College, where he was named best all-round college athlete of the southeast. After his college career, he played professional baseball two years prior to his coming to Centenary. Since President Bourne had come to Centenary from the faculty of Birmingham-Southern, he no doubt had known Norton and saw in him a man of character and coaching ability who would enhance the athletic program of Centenary. Norton also was the son of a Methodist minister, and this fact added to his credentials.



Homer Norton

After he arrived at Centenary, Norton began to put together respectable teams in basketball, football, and baseball, and the College was playing as a member of the LIAA (Louisiana Intercollegiate Athletic Association), having been admitted in 1921. In 1922, the basketball team, built around the “Coushatta five,” won the LIAA championship and added Ole Miss as one of its victims.

By the fall season of 1921, Norton was able to rejuvenate the football program and make a respectable record of four games won and three lost against mostly Louisiana teams. Team members were from Shreveport or from nearby Louisiana towns. The names of this 1921 team are as follows: George Pattison, Coty Rosenblath, Lloyd McDade, Clyde Wafer, Robert L. “Dugan” Brown, Lamar “Red” Lowery, James Horton, Haywood Manheim, W.B. Worley, Albert Harper, Lloyd Townsend, Robert Read, Larry Armstrong, Stith Bynum, J.V. Hendrick, Sidney Conger, Eugene Williamson, Erwin LeBlanc, and John Preston. Several members of this 1921 team became prominent Shreveport doctors and businessmen, and one became a Methodist minister.

A College Football Team That Prayed

In 1920, a small church-related institution in Danville, Kentucky, Centre College, captured the imagination of the nation with a football team that had not lost a game since 1917. Coached by a unique man, Uncle Charlie Moran, who was not only coach but a friend, guide, philosopher, and trainer to the team, Centre had beaten teams such as Syracuse and Princeton, and in 1920 was invited to the Harvard stadium for a game with this national giant. Centre's team, known as the "Praying Colonels" of Kentucky, and led by the famous quarterback "Bo" McMillin, was of such national renown that over 40,000 football fans greeted them as they entered the stadium on that momentous day. Although losing 24 to 14, Centre scored twice on a Harvard team that had not been scored on in two years.

The climax came the next year, 1921, when the Centre team returned for a re-match and beat the Harvard aggregation 6-0. It was accomplished by a reverse run of 32 yards by none other than the famous "Bo" McMillin. He had taken the measure of mighty Harvard University. This electrifying news was announced to the Centenary student body by President Sexton on November 4, 1921, when the College had a special interest in securing the services of this Centre College athlete.

This famous football hero received attention from all the major newspapers and magazines of the country. His coach and the athletic director at Centre College, who produced the "Praying Colonels," were placed in the spotlight as noble characters who drew upon the resources of Divine Power to inspire the team to victory.

In explanation of how the Centre team had come to be known as the "Praying Colonels," Bo relates the following incident:

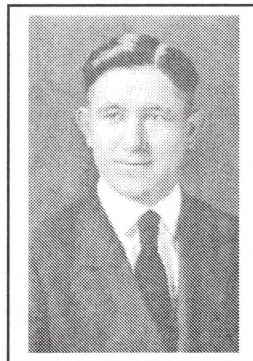
"We were in the gymnasium getting ready for the game (with Kentucky State) and Uncle Charles (the coach) had been outlining our battle tactics. Presently he stopped short, and when he spoke again his voice was low and serious. 'I suppose I've been what some folks would call a rough cuss, but I've always played the game of life straight. You know that. I don't go in for religion, and I reckon most of you don't, either. But I believe in God and I'm sure He looks after folks who are doing their best. Won't one of you say just a word of prayer?' And then one of the players, asking

the privilege of doing so in a very unconventional way, to say the least, prayed.

“It wasn’t a prayer for victory. It was just an honest, whole-hearted appeal that every man that day might give the best he had in him for Old Centre; that he might play a clean game, and not be hurt badly enough so that he would have to be taken out. And Centre won the game, 3-0! That is a prayer for all of us—that we may play a clean game, and that we may not be hurt badly enough to have to be taken out. Since that afternoon, no Centre College football team has gone on to the field for a game without that word of prayer. We don’t pray to win. We play to win, and pray to play our best. But we believe there’s a God who wants people to be square and give the best they’ve got to everything they go into. I have noticed, however, that there has seldom been any profanity or rough talk around the dressing room or on the field since we started this particular habit. And I don’t think there’s a man of us who doesn’t feel that he’s stronger and finer as a result of it.”

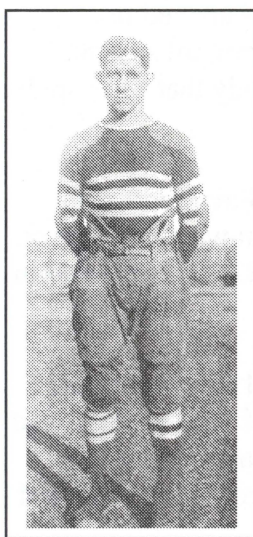
Shreveport and Centenary Venture into Big Time Football

Needless to say, the sports-minded citizens of Shreveport were fascinated by the Cinderella story of “Bo” McMillin and his famous football team from Centre College. Here, indeed, was another version of David and Goliath. Little Centre was the giant killer among the great universities. And a football team that prayed! Sunday School teachers could use this fact to illustrate their lessons on prayer. Youth were inspired by the example of the “Praying Colonels,” and a Methodist College would certainly be blessed with a football coach such as “Bo” McMillin.



"Bo" McMillin

Members of the Board of Trustees were impressed, especially the sports-minded, and there were several. President Sexton, forever an opportunist in his relation to the Shreveport community when Centenary College was involved, began to dream of a new coach and great football team. If Centre College could do it, Centenary could do it better!



Player McMillin

In February 1921, a key person in the “Bo” McMillin episode, Miss Laura Bishop, was added to the Centenary faculty as professor of English. She had been a teacher in North Fort Worth, Texas, where “Bo” was one of her favorite students in grammar school and later in high school. She had been teacher, counselor, and friend of this restless young athlete, and when the Fort Worth school secured R.L. Meyer from Centre College as coach, this team won the North Texas championship with “Bo” as the quarterback. When Coach Meyer returned to Centre College as athletic director, he took with him “Bo” McMillin and five other members of this high school championship team. This group of athletes from the North Fort Worth

High School formed the core of the famous Centre College football team of the early 1920s. “Bo” McMillin was calling signals for his former high school teammates. Miss Laura Bishop knew all about the six members of the “Praying Colonels” football team.

When the Trustees of Centenary College voted to offer “Bo” McMillin the coaching job, President Sexton turned to Miss Laura Bishop as the one person who could persuade him to come to Centenary. She had continued her correspondence with “Bo” after he went to Centre College, and now she was given authority to negotiate with him for the job at Centenary. After she contacted him, he wired back to her that he had offers from a school in Birmingham and one in Dallas at \$7,000 per year.

Miss Bishop conveyed this information to President Sexton and a Board of Trustees meeting was called for December 10, 1921.

Dr. George Sexton, wise in the way of worldly publicity, presented the name of “Bo” McMillin as a possible coach for the Centenary College football team. This was done in an apologetic manner since he saw no way the College could pay \$8,000 a year for a coach. The salary of the president was only \$6,000. But E.A. Frost immediately rose to the occasion, perhaps not unprepared, and moved that McMillin be offered \$8,000 per year on a two-year contract and that the citizens of Shreveport guarantee the money.

Soon thereafter, McMillin signed a contract and arrived in Shreveport to make preparations for the 1922 football season. President Sexton made it plain to the student body that the popular Coach Norton would be retained.

It is interesting to note that McMillin came to Shreveport from Centre College, in Danville, Kentucky, the town which had given the College of Louisiana its first president in 1825, a Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Jeremiah Chamberlain.

A college that had eschewed football as a brutal and distracting game and intercollegiate athletics as wasteful of time, energy, and money, now embraces the sport with all fervor as a means of attracting attention to itself. Madison Avenue could have learned some lessons from President George Sexton.

The *Maroon and White* (Centenary's student newspaper) ran the following headline on December 16, 1921:

"Santa Klaus puts McMillin in Centenary's Sock!"

Other headlines followed:

"For a secluded college, Centenary has leaped into fame overnight!"

"The histories of McMillin and Centenary are being run on presses in every state in the Union."

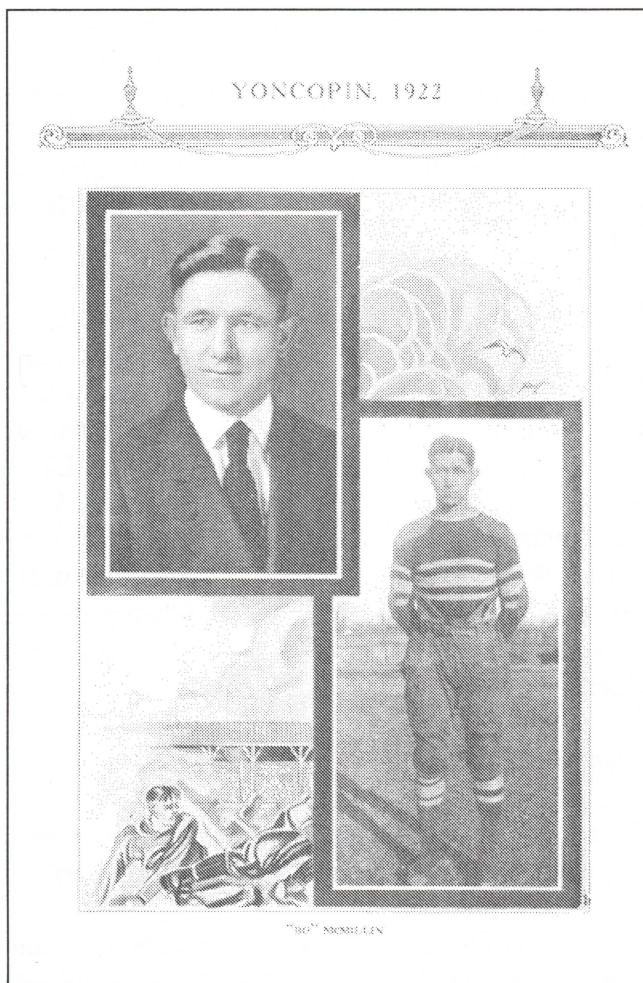
"Bo McMillin signs a 3-year contract with Centenary" was the flaring headline that streamed across the sport pages of the leading newspapers of the United States and caused the nation's eyes to focus on Centenary.

Soon thereafter a new song was written for the Centenary student body, including the following stanza and chorus (not necessarily approved by the English Department!):

*Unto Shreveport from the north and from the south, the
east and the west,
Crowds the jam of eager students to the city's pine clad
crest.
To develop brain and body Centenary gets the best.
Great "Bo" is coming here.
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!
Great "Bo" is coming here!*

On January 13, 1922, the new coach and his bride of a few weeks were introduced at a chapel service, and he spoke of his delight in coming to Centenary and his plans for a great football team.

Soon thereafter, a group of prominent citizens organized the Shreveport-Centenary Athletic Association and gave a banquet for 250 people at the Youree Hotel honoring the new coach and saluting Centenary's promising future. Members of this new athletic association included several prominent trustees and other strong supporters of the college: George Wray, chairman, J.C. Palmer, E.A. Frost, J. B. Atkins, B.C. Garrett, T.C. Clanton, and H.B. Hearn. This new Athletic Association, organized to aid and promote athletics at Centenary, was another link in the chain that bound the city and the College together in mutual helpfulness.



Page 88, 1922 *Yoncopin*

The First "Bo" McMillin Football Team 1922

The new coach lost no time in recruiting a large contingent of prospective football players, some coming as transfers from other colleges and many from various high schools who were anxious to play under the famous coach.

Since several players on this first McMillin team were destined to be famous names in the athletic world, we herewith list the roster of lettermen:

*Coty Rosenblath, Captain	Shreveport, La.
*Clyde Wafer	Coushatta, La.
Mickey Lyvers	Kansas City, Mo.
*John Preston	Shreveport, La.
Les Phillips	DeQueen, Ark.
James Weaver	Monroe, N. C.
Herman Hilden	Boonville, Mo.
Bryan Bush	Ruston, La.
Maurice Ellsworth	Willoughby, Ohio
Sam York	Kansas City, Mo.
Cal Hubbard	Keytesville, Mo.
Harry White	Tyler, Tx.
Bard Ferrall	Albuquerque, N. M.
James Pierson	Natchitoches, La.
Charles Dutton	Minden, La.
*R. L. Brown	Jonesboro, La.
H. L. Bridges	Minden, La.
*George Pattison	Mitchell, La.
Carl Anderson	Ft. Worth, Tx.
Marion Wills	Ridgefarm, Ill.
Harold Dillman	Champagne, Ill.
Richard Denman	Waxahachie, Tx.
*Albert Harper	Shreveport, La.

**From previous squad*

Only six players were carried over from the previous squad coached by Homer Norton and they are marked with asterisks.

The first innovation of the new coach was a football summer camp in 1922. As previously mentioned, Centenary had acquired a tract of land on Rich Mountain near Mena, Arkansas, through some friends of President Sexton. The College experimented with a summer school at that location in 1922, and the McMillin team set up training at "Camp Standing Rock" in connection with the

summer school. One player wrote of his experience there as follows: "Never will we forget those days spent at Camp Standing Rock. It is true that the greater part of the time was spent in intensive training. When we were not out on the field in the hot August sun we were up in the classroom listening to a lecture. But we did have some time to ourselves and many of us got a good knowledge of the mountains before leaving. The moonlight nights in the Ouachita Mountains are wonderful and they were especially impressive from the top of Standing Rock where we congregated after supper." *Centenary *Yoncopin* 1923.

When the fall of 1922 arrived, the Centenary community and the citizens of Shreveport were in full anticipation of a new day in Centenary College football. President Sexton had christened the team "Centenary Gentlemen," remembering the "Praying Colonels of Kentucky" who sent the famous "Bo" McMillin to Centenary. "Doc George," as the president was affectionately called, attended the 1922 Summer School and continued to be an avid fan, accompanying the team on its many trips.

McMillin Team Opens New Era

The first game of the 1922 season was with Marshall College, and when Centenary won 77-0, the athletic world realized that something new had been added to the Shreveport school. At the end of the season with the Centenary Gentlemen scoring 295 points and the opponents scoring only 41, there was no doubt that a great new football dynasty was at hand at Centenary College. The one loss of the season was to the University of Tennessee Medical School at Memphis 0-14.

Fifty players reported for duty when the season opened in 1923. Nine new names were added to the 1922 team roster: Murrell Hogue, Clarence Davis, Paul Rebsamen, Glenn Letteer, Wilburn Miller, Wayne Stone, Oscar Hill, and Hiram Lawrence. All nine came from the Ark-La-Tex. This was the year when the team lost only to Boston College in Boston, and Centenary's Cal Hubbard was named All-American. Twenty-three thousand fans saw the game in Boston, and the eastern newspapers gave little Centenary College (400 students) good national exposure.

From the results of the 1923 football season, it was clear that Centenary was ready to drop the weaker teams and seek competition in the stronger athletic conferences.

The 1923 scores tell the story:

35-0 Southwestern Louisiana Institute
40-3 Henderson-Brown
46-7 Chattanooga
31-13 Hendrix College
46-0 Louisiana State Normal
23-0 Texas Christian University
75-0 Kentucky Normal
0-14 Boston College
34-0 Southwestern (Texas) University
14-0 Oglethorpe
27-0 Louisiana Polytechnic Institute

This 1923 season heralded things to come when Centenary ventured into the Southwest Conference for the first time and defeated TCU in Fort Worth 23-0. The Gentlemen played against a team coached by Matty Bell, who had also come from Centre College and was later to become famous at Southern Methodist University.

McMillin's Last Year – 1924

Eight new names appear on the 1924 team roster: O.K. Place, Theodore Schwarzer, Bryon Faulkner, Pat Weekley, Percy Wood, Emmett Meadows, Mack Flenniken, and O.W. Maddox.

The previous loss to Boston College was avenged by a score of 10-9. Centenary lost only one game and that to the "Tennessee Doctors" of Memphis. One excuse offered for the loss was that doctors knew just where to hit to cause the most bodily injuries. This was not sustained by any scientific evidence!

At the end of the 1924 football season, the three "Bo" McMillin football teams had won 90 percent of their games (26 out of 29) and as a result Centenary was favorably known throughout the nation. But there were also irritating problems in connection with the program.

One of the obstacles to Centenary's entrance into the SIAA (Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association) was its over-emphasis on football and the cost of the athletic program. There was also considerable criticism by other schools that Centenary was using ineligible players, so much so that President Sexton, in

November 1923, requested the College's athletic committee to fully investigate the classroom standing of all football players. At this time, Centenary was hopeful of entering the Southwest Conference, made up primarily of Texas schools.

Football Program Costly

The College trustees were gravely concerned over the deficits incurred in the athletic budget, and, despite the winning record of the team, the gate receipts did not cover the expenses. Historically, this was a new and troublesome condition faced by the trustees, who in a previous century had opposed all intercollegiate athletics and banned football in particular as a brutal and dangerous game.

The 1924 financial report for the football program alone showed a loss of \$7,199.

Gate Receipts	\$28,293
Student Fees	523
Signs and Ad Space	<u>600</u>
Total Receipts	\$29,416

Coach: Salary & Housing	\$ 9,000
Assistant Coaches	2,775
Game Expenses	19,813
Supplies	2,500
Field	369
Other Expenses	<u>1,872</u>
Total	\$36,615

The above budget does not include athletic scholarships. The athletic budget was a disproportionate amount for a college with fewer than 500 students and a total budget of only \$119,585.

Some disturbing reports surfaced at the December meeting of the College trustees that same year. Centenary had been denied entrance into the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as well as the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association because of the large salary of Coach McMillin and his general reputation in athletic circles. It appeared that the chief factor in making Centenary nationally known and providing growth incentive was now the chief factor in preventing the College from entering the

best academic and athletic circles of the South and of the nation. These agencies had serious reservations about admitting a college with an enrollment of 404 (as of June 4, 1924) that paid its football coach a \$9,000 (including housing) salary and its president a salary of \$6,000 plus housing.

After much discussion at the December 19, 1924 meeting, the Board of Trustees ordered that McMillin be offered a one-year contract at \$5,000 per annum. This of course was tantamount to a request for resignation, and it was soon forthcoming.

The Centenary *Conglomerate* (student newspaper) of December 19, 1924, stated that after McMillin's salary was reduced and he was relieved as coach of the football team, Centenary was admitted into the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association. The article further states that "in losing Bo McMillin Centenary loses one of the most spectacular football players and one of the most successful coaches found in college football. Such was the price Centenary had to pay for membership in the SIAA."

McMillin quickly accepted a coaching position at Geneva College in Pennsylvania, and a large contingent of students and other well-wishers gathered at the railway station on February 6, 1925, to bid this remarkable athlete farewell.

Four Centenary players followed McMillin to Geneva : Cal Hubbard, Carl Anderson, Mack Flenniken, and O.W. Maddox. With the help of these four, Geneva was able to defeat Harvard in 1926, another upset. Cal Hubbard went on to the professional football and baseball leagues. He was later elected to both the Football Hall of Fame and the Baseball Hall of Fame, a unique honor for one of the great players of Centenary College.

Earl Davis, a One-Year Coach

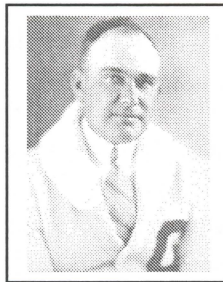
On February 18, 1925, Centenary obtained a new coach in the person of Earl Davis from McKendree College, Lebanon, Illinois, another Methodist institution, to replace McMillin. However, the job was too difficult for the new coach. He was unpopular with the faculty and the student body, and the football players, for whatever reasons, rejected him outright. A scurrilous letter purported to be written by one of the football players raised some doubts as to the intelligence and leadership of Coach Davis. This widely distributed letter may or may not have influenced the College administration to release the coach, but in any event he was soon fired.

The Homer Norton Era Begins

The 1925 team, with the impetus carried over from the McMillin era, lost only two games, to Tulane and Butler. The powerful Tulane team was a member of the Southwestern Conference and drew 10,000 to the game on Thanksgiving Day in Shreveport.

Members of this 1925 Centenary varsity team were: Paul Rebsaman, Percy Wood, Byron Faulkner, W.F. Bozeman, Otto Duckworth, John Preston, Ernest Kepke, Audie Marsalis, Glen Crawford, Sam York, Jim Pierson, Clarence Davis, Zolie Benett, Wayne Stone, J. Horton, Hiram Lawrence, Crawford Young, Clyde Faulk, Walter Stewart, Glen Letteer, Emmet Meadows, Files Binion, Harry White, Al Beam, Beverly Faulk, and Lloyd Clanton. A strong freshman team was waiting in the wings. Most of these players were from the Ark-La-Tex.

For the 1926 football season, a wise move was made when Norton was named head coach and George D. Hoy, coach of the strong Shreveport High School football team, was brought to Centenary as assistant coach. Coach Hoy brought with him several of



Homer Norton



George Hoy

his football players who graduated that year, including Jake Hanna, who became an outstanding star and later the head coach of the Gentlemen. The choice of Norton as head coach in 1926 was soon followed by another national honor for Centenary when Norton was elected to membership in the National Coaches Association.

Curtis Parker Joins Coaching Staff

Another successful deal in 1926 brought Curtis Parker as basketball coach and coach of the freshman football team. Parker was a recent graduate of the University of Arkansas where he had been an all-round athlete. He fitted into the Centenary tradition with his zeal, intelligence, and dedication not only to the athletic program but to the general welfare of the College. He was a popular figure on the campus and in the Shreveport community. His basketball teams had a winning record, and, at a later date,



Curtis Parker

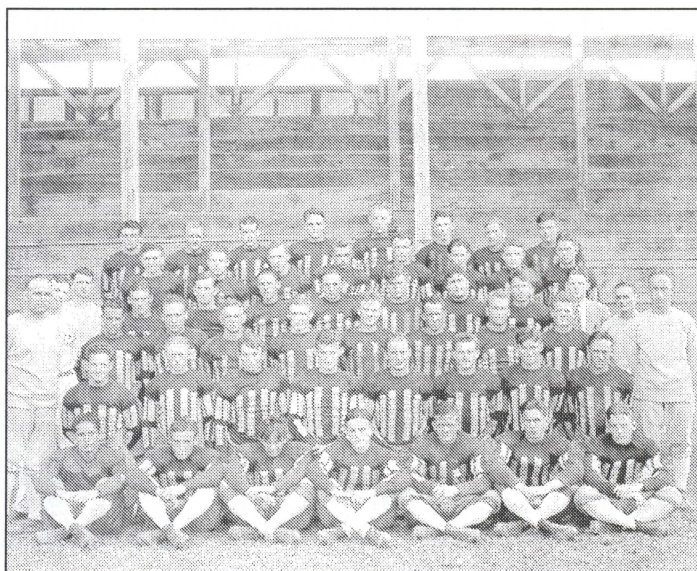
after Norton left, he moved up to head football coach, in which position he was a winning coach in his own right.

Winning in the Southwest Conference

As previously noted, the Centenary Gentlemen in 1923 played one game in the Southwest Conference, defeating Texas Christian University in Fort Worth. President Sexton and his coaching staff had high hopes of Centenary's being admitted to this conference, and beginning in 1926 teams from this conference were scheduled on a regular basis. The 1926 schedule included Texas Christian, Southern Methodist, and the University of Arkansas. Although losing to all three by a close margin in 1926, Centenary soon took the full measure of these powerful schools and became the scourge of that conference. One year later, four of these schools were victims of the undefeated Centenary Gentlemen.

The 1927 Undefeated Team

By 1927, the Centenary football team began to reach its zenith. Coach Parker, of the freshman team, was feeding well-trained players into the varsity unit, and coaches Norton and Hoy were producing great teams from a large roster of young athletes who were coming mostly from the surrounding towns and cities. This 1927 team was the first to go through the season without a loss, and among the teams defeated were four powers in the Southwest Conference – Southern Methodist, Baylor, Rice, and Texas Christian.



1927 Undefeated Centenary Football Team

The large roster of varsity players gives some idea of the dominant place football now played in the program of Centenary: Franklin Allday, W. F. Bozeman, Robert Brown, Emory Browne, John T. Cox, Paul Crawford, Elwood Davis, Harry Davis, Beverly Faulk, Roland Faulk, Robert Goodrich, Ted Gregg, Ernest Guinn, Clarence Hamel, Jake Hanna, Tony Hernandez, Joe Holloway, Ted Jefferies, Louis Jennings, Wiltz Ledbetter, Charles Lindsay, Joe Magrill, Peyton Mangum, Audie Marsalis, J. B. Parrish, Leon Price, Hubert A. Reaves, Jerome Scanlon, R. D. Sims, Charles Smith, Marvin Speights, Kermit Stewart, Stanley Thomas, Tom Wafer, W. E. Ward, Fred Willis, E. L. Zechiedrich, Files Binion, Fritz Blackshear, Otto Duckworth, Morris Jarratt, William A. Robinson, and Ryland Schaal.

In 1927, as Centenary began to win games in the Southwest Conference, sports writers in some of the Texas newspapers accused it of playing "ineligible ringers," even declaring that some players were sent by McMillin from his Geneva team for the SMU game to be played in Shreveport. These libelous reports aroused the ire of President Sexton, and he fired off telegrams and letters stating clearly that Centenary played only eligible players under the rules of the SIAA. *The Dallas Times Herald*, heeding the warning of President Sexton, quickly published an apology and correction on October 8, 1927:

A Correction

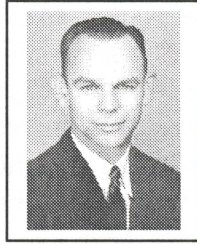
"There appeared in *The Times Herald* of Wednesday, October 5, 1927, a paragraph under the heading 'Pigskin Cracklins,' by Bill Parker, reflecting upon the character, personnel and eligibility of Centenary college football team.

"The statement that 'they will be playing a bunch of ringers,' referring to Centenary college football team, made by Bill Parker, is untrue. It unjustly reflects upon Centenary college football team.

"*The Times Herald* apologizes to Centenary college and to the boys composing the football team for this statement made by Bill Parker."

The Jake Hanna Years

We are indebted to Jake Hanna, bearing a famous Shreveport family name, for a colorful account of his years as a football player at Centenary and later as coach.



"I entered Centenary in February 1927 with 12 other members of the Byrd High School football team because our assistant coach, George Hoy, was joining the athletic department there. On September 24, 1927 I played my first varsity game on our home field, and a local newspaper promoted it with the following article:

Bargain price for Gents first battle of year

"In an effort to bring out new patrons and to stimulate interest in football, admission price has been cut to \$1. Interest in the Centenary football team has been high and season ticket sales greater than ever. President Sexton hopes to increase the football colony this fall.

"Coaches Norton and Hoy had an aggregation of young fellows who loved the game of football, and the great psychologist Norton used more than we realized to produce the undefeated team of 1927 and other successful seasons to follow.

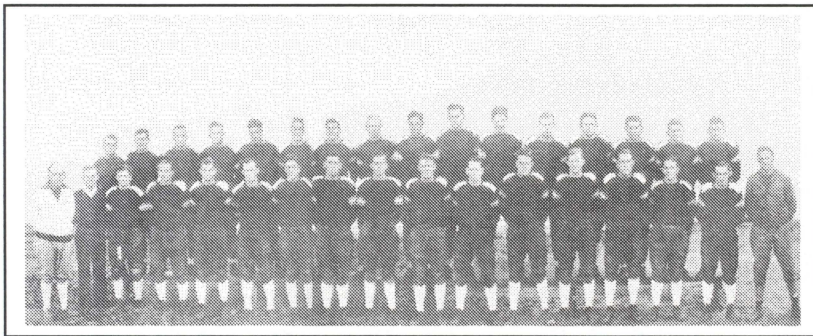
"As the Gentlemen became more and more a threat to Southwest Conference teams there was much speculation as to the chances for Centenary to become a member of that powerful conference. Texas sports writers and the Associated Press spoke favorably for this, but practical evaluation must have prevailed. At this time Centenary's total enrollment was about 500 and this must have had a great bearing in the matter being dropped."

"On October 13, 1928 after Centenary defeated Texas A & M, the lead story from College Station read as follows:

Coach Homer Norton's Centenary College Gentlemen dropped in from Shreveport Saturday afternoon to hand the Texas Aggies the first licking they had received on Kyle Field since 1926.

"Coach Dana X. Bible's Texas Aggies had been conference champions in 1927.

"During those years Shreveport fans were the most loyal to be found. When the special trains of supporters followed the team to out of town games there can be no doubt that their kind of enthusiasm carried over to the players. Newspaper coverage for all the games was superb."



1932 Undefeated Centenary Football Team

The great team of 1932, which helped celebrate the opening of the new stadium by beating Louisiana State University and going on to an undefeated season, was composed of the following who won letters that year: Melford Allums, Perry Ames, John Henry Blakemore, Ben Cameron, Paul Geisler, Louis Glumac, Joe Guillory, Morse Harper, Maurice Morgan, Ralph Murff, Joe Oliphant, Wood Osborne, Harold Oslin, Raymond Parker, Jerry Sellers, Manning Smith, Theo Taylor, Eddie Townson, Robert Waters, Fred Williams, Tommy Wilson and Richard Young.

After the win over Louisiana State University, a Shreveport sports writer noted, "A tiny gridiron spark that had been smoldering in the hearts of successive Centenary College football players for about ten years burst into a roaring flame at Centenary College stadium Saturday afternoon and claimed as its victim the LSU Tigers, a prey it had stalked lo these many moons."

The Associated Press wrote of this 1932 team: "Centenary College of Shreveport with about 400 students and hardly enough players to make two football teams, has the title 'wonder team of the south'. Not since the praying colonels of little Centre College

wrote southern football history a decade ago has a smaller college taken the spotlight like the Centenary Gentlemen of 1932. It's a little team that never gives up."

So great were the achievements of Coach Homer Norton in this 1932 season that the college *Yoncopin* of 1933 was dedicated to him.

Football Wins Wide Support

In the middle and late 1930s when the economic depression was taking its greatest toll on the nation, and the College was cutting back on all expenditures, even to the point of delaying salary payments to the faculty, the football teams lifted the spirits of the College and the Shreveport community with victories against some of the great colleges and universities of the nation. The football trip to Los Angeles and to schools in Iowa, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, Oklahoma, and Arizona generated excitement and enthusiasm as special trains carried the teams, the band, the cheering squads and large contingents of Shreveport supporters. Pullman cars were plastered with Centenary banners and graffiti for all to see as the trains moved through the towns and cities.

In 1936 a special football train of the Illinois Central was announced for the game with the University of Mississippi at Jackson on November 23. The train left Shreveport at 7 a.m. and arrived at Jackson at 12:15 p.m. After the game, the train left Jackson at 6:15 p.m. and arrived in Shreveport at 11:45 p.m. The round-trip fare in the day coach was \$3.25. In 1937, for the game with Loyola at Los Angeles, special cars carried the team, the band, the Maroon Jackets, and a large group of students and Shreveport supporters. The trips into Texas for games at Dallas, Houston, Austin, and Fort Worth provided ample opportunity for fun and frolic by the student body and the numerous Shreveport fans. The Texas sports writers gave wide publicity to this little Shreveport school; and when the team won, it was an easy matter to recruit students from the Lone Star State.

We have already mentioned the benefits of the football program in the Shreveport community in drawing support for the College from wealthy citizens who had a special interest in sports. The spectacular athletic teams of Centenary provided the Shreveport-Bossier City complex with bragging rights and a measure of civic pride.

Ten Years of Football Glory

Beginning in 1927, when the football program at Centenary had fully developed, and continuing through the 1936 season, the teams of that decade wrote a glorious chapter in the annals of the oldest chartered liberal arts college west of the Mississippi River. With fewer than 900 students in any one year and during the darkest days of the economic depression this little Southern college was able to fashion a football team made up of athletes recruited mostly from Louisiana and the nearby states, that won 73 games, lost 22, and tied 11 in competition with some of the great schools of the nation. Playing against the powerful teams of the Southwest Conference during these ten years, Centenary established a record of 23 victories, 11 losses, and 5 ties.

In addition to the teams named above, Centenary played and defeated several of the outstanding colleges and universities of the country: Boston College, University of Chattanooga, University of Iowa, University of Arizona, University of Mississippi, Loyola University of Los Angeles, De Paul University, University of Louisville, St. Louis University, and Louisiana State University.

Homer Norton to Texas A & M

With a nation-wide reputation as coach and athletic director, and with a winning record against the football teams of the Southwest Conference, Homer Norton was persuaded to accept a lucrative coaching job at Texas A & M in 1934. Norton was soon well established there, and after a successful career in coaching he settled in College Station as a successful businessman. At Centenary, Curtis Parker moved up to athletic director and head football coach with E. T. Renfro as assistant.

Walter "Cowboy" Hohmann: A Football Great Tells His Story

One of the athletes playing on the football team 1933-1936 was Walter "Cowboy" Hohmann. He heard of Centenary College as a football power from the coach of his high school near Chicago. His arrival at Centenary in 1933 and his subsequent experiences there are the subject of a taped interview made by the author after Hohmann's retirement.

"After arriving by bus from Chicago I was checked in and then had to wait to see if I made the football team. It was hard living and my scholarship required that I work on the

campus. Our team played and beat some of the great schools of the nation. Homer Norton, our coach from Birmingham-Southern College, was a great influence on the lives of the players, and after he went to Texas A & M Curtis Parker carried on. All athletes were required to meet the academic requirements. I found the teachers to be wonderful people as well as great instructors, and I especially remember Dean Hardin, Dr. R.E. Smith, Dr. J.B. Entrikin, Mrs. Arthur Campbell, Dr. Pierce Cline, Dr. S.A. Steger, Dr. Mary Wartens, and others.

“The Shreveport business community was very much in support of the college, and the athletic teams in their games proved to be a rallying point for the town people, and the entire college community. All of us were aware of the strong sense of fellowship throughout the life of the college. When I came back in 1963 as dean of students I found a college that had grown in amazing proportions with many new professors and buildings, but the same great community spirit in the students and faculty.”

Hohmann fitted into the Centenary tradition not only as an outstanding football player but also as an all-round student and leader on the campus, serious about getting an education and being useful in society. In 1937, he was named freshman football coach.

Centenary Football Casualty of Word War II

With the advent of World War II in 1939, the great years of Centenary football came to an end. The actual decline in football power began in 1937 with an increase in the number of games lost and a decrease in the number of major teams scheduled. With former coach Homer Norton installed as the successful coach of Texas A & M and the rising powers of the Southwest Conference, recruiting in Texas was no longer an easy matter for the Gentlemen. Centenary continued to be a small college with fewer than 1,000 students as opposed to the great schools of the Southwest Conference and other conferences included in Centenary's schedule. Since Centenary was never admitted to the major athletic conferences, it became more and more difficult to include the larger schools in its schedule. Interest in the home games began to wane, and subsequent losses in income created a continuous financial crisis at a time when the College could ill afford any financial losses.

The decline of the great Centenary Gentlemen football program may be plotted by the won and lost records beginning in 1937:

1937 Won 6, lost 4, tied 2

1938 Won 7, lost 4

1939 Won 2, lost 9, tied 1

1940 Won 3, lost 7

1941 Won 1, lost 7, tied 2

Although these were losing seasons, there were several outstanding players on the teams whose personal records are worthy of note: Alvin Birklebach, Winfred Bynum, Ogbourne Rawlinson, Ed Whitehurst, Claude Teel, Jimmy Patterson, and others.

Curtis Parker Resigns – Jake Hanna Returns

The year 1940 brought another coaching change for the Centenary Gentlemen football team when Curtis Parker resigned to enter the oil business in Shreveport and Centenary brought Jake Hanna, one of its own great players of recent years, back to the campus as head coach. The 1940 *Yoncopin* presented a full-page picture of Hanna with this caption: "A Star Returns."

Coach Hanna's Last Teams

Coach Jake Hanna has written an interesting account of the last teams prior to the end of World War II.

"Eleven years after graduation from Centenary the great privilege of returning to the school was given me when I was offered the position of athletic director and head coach. In January 1940, my contract was presented by the Centenary Athletic Committee composed of Charlton H. Lyons, Sr., John McCormick, Henry O'Neal, Bonneau Peters and Allen Norris. Dr. Pierce Cline, who had been my history professor while I was a student, was now president of the college and he encouraged me to accept the coaching position. He had been one of the best of friends to me as a student and continued to be to the end of his life. Returning to my *alma mater* as a member of the faculty might be considered my post-graduate degree.

"I was fortunate to have continue on the athletic staff the capable service and support of Elmer Smith as backfield

coach and scout, Tom Cobb as line coach, and trainer Marvin "Hoot" Gibson.

"I was soon to meet a group of strong, talented and knowledgeable young men who were the material I was to work with in preparing for a football season in 1940.

"I was not prepared for the financial difficulties under which the athletic department had operated for a number of years. This obstacle combined with the cloud of World War II became my major problems and made long-range planning a dismal prospect.

"Perhaps the best summary of events taking place in the athletic department over the next two years, 1940-1942, may be compared to another era in Centenary College's history when in 1861 inscribed in the faculty minutes were written the dramatic words: 'Students have all gone to war. College suspended. And God help the right.'"



1939 team meets new coach, Jake Hanna

As Coach Jake Hanna indicated in his article previously quoted, the military draft in 1940 and 1941 wrought havoc with his squad of players, and Centenary's football program declined precipitously. The record for the 1940 season was three games won and seven lost.

The final season, 1941, recorded no games won, eight lost and two tied against the following opponents:

Centenary 0,	Millsaps 20
Centenary 20,	Creighton 32
Centenary 6,	Louisiana Normal 6
Centenary 6,	Hardin – Simmons 27
Centenary 0,	Texas Tech 25
Centenary 7,	Washington Univ. (St. Louis), 13
Centenary 0,	Rice University 54
Centenary 7,	Texas Christian University 35
Centenary 0,	Southwestern (Memphis) 0
Centenary 7,	Louisiana Tech 39

After football was dropped, Jake Hanna continued at Centenary as athletic director and developed an excellent program of intramural sports that included most of the student body.

Demise of the Football Program

As early as May 1939, the trustees began to think seriously about discontinuing the football program. Two of the strongest trustees, J.B. Atkins and George Wray, headed the athletic committee. They were well aware of the problem of deficit financing for the program each year. The gate receipts continued to decline. At the end of the 1939 season, two meetings of the executive committee gave full attention to problems of the athletic program.

At the annual meeting of the College trustees on May 21, 1940, it was reported that \$5,000 had been advanced to the football program from the operating fund, and again the program was placed on probation. One year later the Board of Trustees again considered scrapping the football program. Attendance and gate receipts continued downward, and the team was no longer playing colleges from the major athletic conferences.

The executive committee of the Board of Trustees finally blew the whistle on the football program on December 12, 1941, after another disastrous season. For the duration of the war, football was dead at Centenary. A committee was named to solicit funds to pay the athletic program deficit, a problem which had plagued the College since the glory years of football in the 1920s and 1930s despite the support of the Chamber of Commerce and many sports-minded citizens.

After the war ended in 1945, the College moved to reinstate all phases of intercollegiate athletics. However, football had to wait

until 1947. The basketball program was reinstated in full, beginning with the 1946 season.

In December of 1946, a committee of seven was created to reinstate a football program. Jess Thompson of Lawton, Oklahoma, was invited to the coaching position, with Paul Cochran as assistant. These two had been coaches at Cameron State Junior College in Lawton, Oklahoma. Mr. Charles Rollins, a local business executive, was employed as administrative assistant to the athletic committee, with responsibility for ticket sales and arranging the game schedules. The coach was paid \$5500 and his assistant, \$4000. Since the old wooden stadium was in disrepair, arrangements were made to use the Shreveport Fair Grounds stadium. Mr. Arch Haynes gave \$10,000 to improve the Centenary athletic field for baseball and for football practice. Again we see the great interest of Mr. Haynes in the Centenary athletic program and his continual financial support of the College.

The attempt to reinstate the football program came to a halt at the end of the 1947 season. The trial run of one year was a disaster in terms of the won-lost columns, the attendance for the home games, and consequently the financial loss.

The 1948 college *Yoncopin* gave pictures of the coaches and players of the 1947 team and an apologetic write up of each game. Out of ten games, Centenary won only one and that was against lowly Louisiana College, never a great football power. Few of the competing colleges were well known in Shreveport. Perhaps the cruelest blow of all that year was the loss to Centenary's ancient rival, Louisiana Tech, by a score of 51 to 14.

This 1948 *Yoncopin* portrays coach Jess Thompson as a big muscular man with a hard-set jaw and serious demeanor. Thirty-five players are featured in various action poses with fierce and threatening gestures, carrying or throwing the ball, but on the playing field the whole aggregation was easily subdued. The Chamber of Commerce withdrew its subsidy of the program, and coaches Thompson and Cochran were relieved of their duties. The executive committee of the Board of Trustees on December 15, 1947 made it official and final that intercollegiate football was dead at Centenary College. This was confirmed at the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 29, 1948, and President Mickle mildly lamented the demise of this once spectacular program at Centenary. Other programs were now developing that gave lasting fame and prestige to the institution.

Football Remembered

The football program at Centenary College had written a glorious chapter and deposited a vast fund of memories in the annals of this ancient and honorable institution of learning. All hail to President George Sexton, who wisely set the enlarged football program in motion, to the Board of Trustees and the athletic committees, to the Shreveport Chamber of Commerce, and the loyal friends of the College whose financial support made it all possible.

All hail to the capable and dedicated coaches, Homer Norton, "Bo" McMillin, Curtis Parker, and Jake Hanna, the trainers and business managers, and the assistant coaches.

All hail to the outstanding athletes of the great teams including those who failed to win the coveted letter "C" but bore the brunt of pounding from the varsity squad. All hail to the supportive student body and the fans who filled the stadium and accompanied the team on its many trips. Hail to all those known and unknown who made possible this epic period in the history of Centenary College of Louisiana. To the glory years of football at Centenary, Hail and Farewell!

The End

